

Occult Trajectories: Magic and Modernity

MA Program Religion and Spirituality

2nd semester, Block 1-2, 2020-2021

Credits: 12 EC

Lecturer: Marco Pasi

Class hours: Tuesdays 9:00-11:45 (first session: 9:00-10:30; second session: 10:35-11:45)

Location: Zoom

Study guide

Objectives

While focusing on a particular aspect of modern western esotericism, the student will also become familiar with the main lines of its historical development. Some of the main figures, currents and movements of modern western esotericism will be discussed. The course will also instruct the student to approach the reading material with a critical eye and develop awareness of broader cultural problems related to its origins, transmission, and interpretation.

Contents

Magic and Modernity

Occult Trajectories focuses on different aspects of the history of western esotericism in the modern period, from the eighteenth century up to the present days. The aim is to follow both the internal development, understood from the specific perspective of the field, and the broader cultural context in which western esotericism has taken shape, in order to understand both the inside logics of esotericism and its responses to external social pressure. Every year a different theme is chosen that offers a unique entry point in this historical development. This year, the subject is modern western esotericism and magic.

Magic has always been a “problem” in western culture, and some authors have argued that western culture itself has constructed its own identity, among other things, on the basis of a recurrent anti-magical polemic. Other authors, particularly influenced by Max Weber’s theory of disenchantment, have on the other hand argued that magic began to disappear in the early modern period, being replaced by a more rational worldview. Magic therefore would not “belong” to the modern world and would only survive as a worn-out superstition. But magic has proved to be resilient and has not disappeared at all, as the history of western esotericism clearly demonstrates. In recent years, the relationship between magic and modernity has been the object of new interpretations and has been seen in a new light. This new development is very significant for the appreciation of the role of magic in the history of modern western esotericism. In the first part of the course methodological aspects in the study of magic will be discussed, first from a general point of view, and then more specifically in relation to the study of western esotericism and modernity. In the following parts, the course will take a more historical, if not strictly chronological, approach, focusing on different moments in the

history of magic within the context of modern western esotericism. The course will make use of both primary sources and secondary literature.

Recommended prior knowledge

For students who have not followed my course in the BA program (Western esotericism from the 18th century) or who are not already familiar with the history of modern western esotericism, the reading of one of the following books is recommended: Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012; or Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Presence and active participation

All students are expected to read the material for every class and to participate actively in the discussions. Students are advised that attendance is a requisite for a successful completion of the course, and that consequently it will be checked. No more than three classes can be missed.

Class structure

Students are divided into two groups before the beginning of the course: group A and group B. You can check to which group you belong [here](#) (click on the "Groups" tab).

Classes are divided into two sessions. Groups A and B attend the two sessions alternately (if Group A attends the first session, Group B attends the second session; the following week the order is reversed, etc.). This is specified in the course schedule.

During the first session (from 9:00 to 10:30) the lecturer introduces the topic. After that, a group of students (the "presenters") summarise and present the questions for the day (15 mins in total). Then, after a first break, the discussion is opened to the whole group. After this discussion, the first session ends and there is a second break. Students from the first session can leave now if they wish (if they stay, they turn their camera and microphone off and don't participate in the discussion anymore), with the exception of three selected students (the "remainers"). Students from the second session join now.

The second session starts now (from 10:35 to 11:45). The students from the second session are divided into three subgroups and sent to breakout rooms. They are joined by the three selected students from the first session (the remainers), who summarize what has been said during the first session (my introduction, the questions and the discussion, 15 mins). Then they all return from the breakout rooms to the main environment and an open discussion follows until the end of the class.

Assignments and grade breakdown

Overview. The assignments for the course are: 1) Posting a question based on the class's literature every week; 2) Presentation of the day's questions in groups of three; 3) Summary of the first session in the second session (not graded); 4) A book review as a final assignment (2000 words max., no footnotes but bibliography allowed). There is also the possibility to take an extra assignment, a

very short paper analysing one of the texts from the reading material for the classes (1000 words max.).

Posts about the reading material. Each student is expected to post a question, a comment, or a short reflection about the reading material for every class (80 words max.). Posts are due on Friday, 12:00 (noon) at the latest before every class. The posts will be used as a starting point for the discussions during classes. Posts should be submitted in the "Discussions" section on Canvas. A dedicated discussion forum will be created for every class. You can skip this assignment no more than three times. The posts are not graded, but if you fail to submit a post for more than three classes 1 point will be deducted from your final grade.

Presentations. Students are divided into small groups of two or three before the beginning of the course. Each group of presenters will summarise and present the posts for that particular class. The group will collect the posts submitted on Canvas, summarise their main drift, and distill from them what seem most important and relevant for the discussion. Each group is free to decide how the work (ie, preparation and presentation) will be shared among its members. Powerpoint slides can be used but are not obligatory. The presentation cannot last more than 15 mins all in all. It is graded and all members in the group will receive the same grade. This assignment will count for 25% of the final grade.

Book review. The final assignment will consist in a book review (2000 words max., no footnotes, but bibliography allowed). A list of books recommended for review can be found [here](#). Students are free to propose books not included in the list to the lecturer (please only monographs, no collective books or anthologies). If you want to familiarise yourself with how a scholarly book review is written I recommend that you browse the reviews written for the journal *Aries* (see [here](#)). The book review will have to be submitted by 31 May. Students who submit their review after the deadline will have a reduction of one point in their grade for the assignment for each week of delay after the deadline. This assignment will count for 75% of the final grade.

Text analysis. Students have the possibility to take an extra assignment if they wish. In this case they will have to write a short analysis of one of the texts from the reading material of one of the classes (either primary sources or secondary literature, 1000 words max.). The analysis should include the following parts: contextualisation (who is the author? when was the text written? when and where was it published? which version/edition of the text are you reading? what kind of audience is the text meant for? what are the author's interlocutors? etc.), description (what does the text say? what is its structure? what is its main object/purpose? what are the main arguments used by the author?), and assessment (what is your personal opinion of the text? how would you motivate it?). This analysis should have no more than 1000 words. The deadline for this extra assignment is 30 April. Students taking this assignment will have a chance to improve their final grade by opting for a different grade breakdown: in this case the presentation will be 15%; the book review will be 50%; and the text analysis will be 35%. This exceptional breakdown will be applied only if it actually improves the score of the standard breakdown so as to eliminate any risk for those who want to take this extra assignment.

The University of Amsterdam Fraud and Plagiarism regulations apply to the assessment of this course. These regulations can be consulted [here](#).

NB: The program will be constantly updated during the course and especially after the first class, when the schedule is finalised. Please check this page regularly.

For all further information, you can contact the lecturer directly at: m.pasi@uva.nl.

Schedule of classes

9 February

Class 1: Introduction: how this course works

General introduction, discussion of themes, and practical instructions about participation and assignments.

16 February (first session: group A; second session: group B; presenters in the first session: Huck and Forrest; remainers in the second session: Tjalling, Fanny, and Nikita)

Class 2: The proper study of magic

[Marco Pasi, "Theses de magia", *Societas Magica Newsletter*, 20 \(Fall 2008\), pp. 1-8. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

[Michael E Heyes, "Magic East and West: A Refutation of Pasi's Eighth Thesis"; and Claire Villarreal, "...And Gnosis for All", *Societas Magica Newsletter*, 24 \(Fall 2010\), pp. 4-6. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

[Marco Pasi, "Theses de magia: A response to the responses", *Societas Magica Newsletter*, 24 \(Fall 2010\), pp. 4-5, 7. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

[Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg, "General Introduction", in: Id. \(eds.\), *Defining Magic. A Reader*, Sheffield - Bristol \(Ct.\), Equinox, 2012, pp. 1-15. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Randall Styers, *Making Magic. Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World*, Oxford - New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 25-68.

23 February (first session: group B; second session: group A; presenters in the first session: Nicole and David; remainers in the second session: Brennan, Cyrano, and Noelia)

Class 3: The study of magic and modern Western esotericism

Bernd-Christian Otto, "Historicising 'Western Learned Magic'. Preliminary Remarks", *Aries. Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, 16:2 (2016), pp. 161–240.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Tainted Terminologies 2: Magic", in: Id., *Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 164-177.

2 March (first session: group A; second session: group B; presenters in the first session: Tjalling and Fanny; remainers in the second session: Bethany, Ravi, and Laura Kallas)

Class 4: Eliphas Lévi and the new magic of occultism

Julian Strube, "The 'Baphomet' of Eliphas Lévi: Its Meaning and Historical Context", *Correspondences*, 4 (2016), pp. 1–43.

Arthur Edward Waite, "Biographical and Critical Essay", in : E. Lévi, *The Mysteries of Magic: A Digest of the Writings of Eliphas Lévi*, Secaucus, University Books, 1974, pp. 1-41.

- Éliphas Lévi, *Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual*, York Beach, Samuel Weiser, 1999, pp. 1-24; 179-183; 404-411.

9 March (first session: group B; second session: group A; presenters in the first session: Laurie and Cyrano; remainers in the second session: Georgia, Laura Kneebone, and Zoë)

Class 5: In and around the Theosophical Society

John Patrick Deveney, *Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society*, Fullerton, Theosophical History, 1997, pp. 1-60.

- Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, "The Science of Magic," in: Ead., *Collected Writings*, I, Madras - London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1988, pp. 134-144.
- Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, New York, J.W. Bouton - London, Bernard Quaritch, 1877, II vol., pp. 587-597 and 634-640.

16 March (first session: group A; second session: group B; presenters in the first session: Nikita and Bethany; remainers in the second session: Eva, Reinout, and Huck)

Class 6: The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

Alison Butler, "Making Magic Modern: Nineteenth-Century Adaptations", *The Pomegranate*, 6:2 (2004), pp. 212-230.

Christopher A. Plaisance, "Magic Made Modern? Re-evaluating the Novelty of the Golden Dawn's Magic", *Correspondences*, 2:2 (2014), pp. 159-187.

- Samuel Liddel MacGregor Mathers, et al., *Ritual Magic of the Golden Dawn: Works by S.L. MacGregor Mathers and Others*, Rochester, Destiny Books, 1997, pp. 47-89.
- William Butler Yeats, "Magic," in: , *Essays and Introductions*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1961, pp. 28-52.

23 March

No class: exam week.

30 March

No class: study week.

6 April (first session: group B; second session: group A; presenters in the first session: Noelia, Georgia, and Brennan; remainers in the second session: Dennis, Robert, and Lazarus)

Class 7: Between mysticism and magic: A.E. Waite

R[obert] A. Gilbert, *A.E. Waite. Magician of Many Parts*, Wellingborough, Crucible, 1987, pp. 11-14; 88-96; 133-141.

- Arthur Edward Waite, *The Book of Ceremonial Magic. The Secret Tradition in Goëtia - Including the Rites and Mysteries of Goëtic Theurgy, Sorcery and Infernal Necromancy*, London, William Rider & Son, 1911 (repr. : New York, Citadel Press, 1994), pp. xxiii-xliv.
- Arthur Edward Waite, *Shadows of Life and Thought. A Retrospective Review in the Form of Memoirs*, London, Selwyn and Blount, 1938, pp. 65-75; 95-102.

13 April (first session: group A; second session: group B; presenters in the first session: Ravi and Laura Kallas; remainers in the second session: Billie, James, and Reinout)

Class 8: Aleister Crowley's "Magick"

[Marco Pasi, "Varieties of magical experience: Aleister Crowley's views on occult practice", *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 6:2 \(Dec. 2011\), pp. 123-162. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2017, pp. 153-178.

- Abhavananda [Aleister Crowley], "Berashith: An Essay in Ontology, With some Remarks on Ceremonial Magic", in: , *Collected Works*, II, Les Plaines, Yogi Publication Society, n.d. [1973], pp. 233-243.
- Aleister Crowley, "The Initiated Interpretation of Ceremonial Magic," in: Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and Aleister Crowley, *The Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King*, York Beach, Samuel Weiser, 1995, pp. 15-19.
- Aleister Crowley, *Magick: Book Four Parts I - IV*, York Beach, Samuel Weiser, 1994, pp. 121-149; 241-249.

20 April (first session: group B; second session: group A; presenters in the first session: Laura Kneebone, Zoë, and Dennis; remainers in the second session: Peiyao, Nicole, and David)

Class 9: Magic psychologised: Dion Fortune and Israel Regardie

Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 180-188.

Christopher A. Plaisance, "Israel Regardie and the Psychologization of Esoteric Discourse", *Correspondences*, 3 (2015) pp. 5–54.

- [Dion Fortune, "Ceremonial Magic Unveiled", *The Occult Review*, Jan. 1933, pp. 13-24. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

- Dion Fortune, "The Purpose of Magic", in: Dion Fortune et Gareth Knight, *An Introduction to Ritual Magic*, Loughborough, Thoth Publications, 1997, pp. 134-138.
- Israel Regardie, *The Middle Pillar: A Co-Relation of the Principles of Analytical Psychology and the Elementary Techniques of Magic*, Saint Paul, Llewellyn, 1970, pp. i-ix, 13-43.

27 April

No class

4 May (first session: group A; second session: group B; presenters in the first session: Eva and Reinout; remainers in the second session: Forrest, Tjalling, and Fanny)

Class 10: Sexual magic

John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph. A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1997, pp. 181-188; 208-236.

[Hugh B. Urban, "Sex Magic", in: Christopher Partridge \(ed.\), *The Occult World*, London, Routledge, 2014, pp. 564-570. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

[Marco Pasi, "But What Does Esotericism Have To Do With Sex?", in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Peter J. Forshaw, and Marco Pasi \(eds.\), *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2019, pp. 207-215. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

- Aleister Crowley, "Of the Nature of the Gods," in: Francis King (ed.), *Secret Rituals of the OTO*, London, 1973, pp. 169-183.

11 May (first session: group B; second session: group A; presenters in the first session: Robert, Lazarus, and Peiyao; remainers in the second session: Dennis, Brennan, and Laurie)

Class 11: Chaos magic(k)

[Colin Duggan, "Perennialism and Iconoclasm. Chaos Magick and the Legitimacy of Innovation", in: Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm \(eds.\), *Contemporary Esotericism*, Sheffield, Equinox, 2013, pp. 91-112. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

[Colin Duggan, "Chaos Magick", in: Christopher Partridge \(ed.\), *The Occult World*, London, Routledge, 2014, pp. 406-411. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

- Phil Hine, *Condensed Chaos*, Reno, New Falcon Publications, 1995, pp. 9-48.
- Ramsey Dukes, *S.O.T.B.M.E. Revised. An Essay on Magic*, n.p., El-cheapo, 2000, pp. 1-30.

18 May (first session: group A; second session: group B; presenters in the first session: Billie and James; remainers in the second session: Nikita, Bethany, and Laura Kallas)

Class 12: Magical time travels (with Dylan Burns)

Dylan Burns, "Twin Healing Amulets (P. Strasb. UBN Kopt. 201, 202)", in: Anne Boud'hors, Alain Delattre, Catherine Louis and Tonio Sebastian Richter (eds.), *Coptica Argentoratensia: Conférences et documents de la 3e université d'été en papyrologie copte (Strasbourg, 18–25 juillet 2010)*, Paris, Éditions du Bocard, 2014, pp. 117-121.

Jonathan Z. Smith, "Great Scott! Thought and Action One More Time", in: Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (eds.), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, Leiden, Brill, 2001, pp. 73–91.

- Kimberly Stratton, "The Mithras Liturgy and Sefer ha-Razim", in: Richard Valantasis (ed.), *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, Princeton - Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 303-315.
- G.R.S. Mead, *Quests Old and New*, London, Bell & Sons, 1913, pp. 149–176.